

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claim 41, and amend claims 34, 43, 54, and 64, as follow.

1-33. (Canceled)

34. (Currently Amended) A tissue dissector, comprising:

an elongated cannula having a proximal end and a distal end and a central axis extending therebetween;

a distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the cannula to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the cannula through tissue;

a length of screw threads positioned on an outer surface of the cannula proximal to the distal tip; and

a dilating element disposed on the cannula proximal to the distal tip, the dilating element having a smooth oval shaped exterior contour symmetrically disposed about the central axis to facilitate atraumatic expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip advancing through tissue, the dilating element having a cross-sectional dimension of the oval shape that is greater than ~~the~~ a cross-sectional dimension of the distal end of the cannula and greater than ~~the~~ a cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip, the dilating element further comprising a threaded bore hole formed in the dilating element for engaging the length of screw threads on the cannula for removably positioning the dilating element on the cannula.

35. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, wherein the dilating element is solid.

36-37. (Cancelled)

38. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, further including a spacer length of cannula of between 14-28 mm disposed between a distal end of the dilating element and a proximal end of the distal tip.

39. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, wherein the cross-sectional dimension of the oval shape of the dilating element is at least two times larger than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal end of the cannula.

40. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 39, wherein the cross-sectional dimension of the dilating element is between 15-30 mm.

41. (Canceled).

42. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 34, wherein the dilating element is compressible.

43. (Currently Amended) A tissue dissector kit, comprising:

an elongated cannula having a proximal end and a distal end;
a distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the cannula to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the cannula through tissue;

a locking mechanism positioned on the cannula proximal to the distal tip; and

a plurality of dilating elements each adapted to mount on the cannula proximal to the distal tip, each dilating element having a smooth oval shaped exterior contour to facilitate atraumatic expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip, each dilating element having a cross-sectional dimension of the oval shape that is greater than ~~the~~ a cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip, the cross-sectional dimension of each dilating element being different from one another, each dilating element further comprising a mating lock adapted to mate with the locking mechanism on the cannula for removably positioning each dilating element on the cannula, wherein the different dilating elements may be mounted one at a time on the cannula for dissecting tissue and therefore forming cavities of different dimensions.

44. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 43, wherein the locking mechanism comprises a length of screw threads positioned on an outer surface of the cannula, and the mating lock comprises a threaded bore hole formed in each dilating element for engaging the length of screw threads.

45-46. (Canceled)

47. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 43, further including a spacer length of cannula of between 14-28 mm disposed between a distal end of each mounted dilating element and a proximal end of the distal tip.

48. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 43, wherein the cross-sectional dimension of the oval shape of each dilating element is at least two times larger than the cross-sectional dimension of the distal end of the cannula.

49. (Previously Presented) The tissue dissector of claim 48, wherein the cross-sectional dimension of the oval shape of each dilating element is between 15-30 mm.

50-53. (Canceled)

54. (Currently Amended) A tissue dissector, comprising:

an elongated cannula having a proximal end and a distal end;

a distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the cannula to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the cannula through tissue; and

a solid dilating element of fixed outer dimension removably mounted on the cannula proximal to the distal tip, the dilating element having a smooth oval shaped exterior contour to facilitate atraumatic expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip, the dilating element having a cross-sectional dimension of the oval shape that is greater than ~~the~~ a cross-

sectional dimension of the distal end of the cannula and greater than ~~the~~ a cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip, the cannula further including a length of screw threads positioned on an outer surface of the cannula proximal to the distal tip, and wherein the dilating element further comprises a threaded bore hole for engaging the length of screw threads and removably positioning the dilating element on the cannula.

55-63. (Cancelled)

64. (Currently Amended) A tissue dissector, comprising:

an elongated cannula having a proximal end and a distal end; and

a dilating unit removably mounted on the cannula distal end, including:

a distal tip having tapered outer walls converging to a blunt end for dissecting tissue, the tip being disposed on the distal end of the dilating unit to dissect tissue and facilitate passage of the cannula through tissue; and

a dilating element having an oval shape of cross-sectional dimension greater than ~~the~~ a cross-sectional dimension of the distal ~~tip~~ end of the cannula and greater than ~~the~~ a cross-sectional dimension of the distal tip, the dilating element being located proximally with respect to the distal tip to facilitate expansion of tissue following dissection by the tapered distal tip passing through tissue, the cannula further including a length of screw threads positioned on an outer surface of the cannula near the distal end thereof, and wherein the dilating unit further comprises a threaded bore hole for engaging the length of screw threads and mounting the dilating unit on the distal end of the cannula.

65-71. (Cancelled)